

## How do Sanders and Buttigieg Compare on Foreign Policy?

Let's examine the foreign policy positions of the two leading presidential candidates emerging from the first two contests in the Democratic Party nomination process: Pete Buttigieg and Bernie Sanders. While both candidates have sharply rejected President Trump's handling of foreign affairs, Buttigieg and Sanders have advanced different policy approaches—in both broad vision and on specific issues.

Pete Buttigieg frequently relies on his general foreign policy themes, rather than declaring positions on particular issues. He has also been criticized for not answering foreign policy questions posed by journalists. In an article in Vox, Alex Ward tracked eight media surveys submitted to Buttigieg and found that he failed to answer 36 out of 108 questions on foreign policy.

In a major speech given at Indiana University in June 2019, Buttigieg identified three pillars of his foreign policy principles: American values, American interests, and American relationships. Buttigieg sees the United States, historically, as a strong advocate for freedom, justice, and human rights worldwide. According to Buttigieg:

“The greatest strategic advantage for America has always been the fact that our country has stood for values shared by humanity, touching aspirations felt far beyond our borders. However imperfectly, we have represented and defended principles of freedom and democracy that stir human beings wherever they live.”

To advance these values, Buttigieg says, the United States must sometimes use force, but that force must be strategic, legitimate, and used only as a last resort. In using force, especially when acting alone, core U.S. interests must be at stake and no other alternatives available.

Buttigieg argues that “if we wish to promote American values and defend American interests,” then we must strengthen international relationships.

Bernie Sanders also emphasizes broad themes in his foreign policy statements.

In an October 2018 speech, Sanders expressed his concern about the growing popularity of authoritarian leaders (including President Trump) around the world. He connected the massive concentration of wealth among a very few people to the power that oligarchs and multinational corporations exert in bolstering authoritarian governments.

Sanders also makes the case that the U.S.'s enormous military budget is a foreign policy issue (as well as a domestic issue):

“Foreign policy is about U.S. government budget priorities. At a time when we already spend more on defense than the next 12 nations combined, foreign policy is about authorizing a defense budget of some \$700 billion...Meanwhile, at the exact same time as the President and many of my Republican colleagues want to substantially increase military spending, they want to throw 32 million Americans off of the health insurance they currently have because, supposedly, they are worried about the budget deficit.”

Like Buttigieg, Sanders calls for a foreign policy based on diplomacy and support for democracy across the globe. Senator Sanders also insists that our power should support human rights, and economic justice.

## **Sanders & Buttigieg on Specific Foreign Policy Issues**

**Iran.** In 2015, Iran and the European Union, the U.S., China, and Russia agreed to a deal in which Iran would halt its development of nuclear weapons. President Trump ended the U.S. involvement and renewed economic sanctions on Iran. Both candidates would rejoin the agreement.

**Central America & immigration.** Most of the immigrants attempting to enter the United States' southern border are fleeing extraordinary poverty and violence in their home countries. Both candidates would increase aid to the Central American countries aimed at alleviating these conditions.

**Venezuela.** Pete Buttigieg views the 2018 reelection of socialist President Nicolas Maduro as illegitimate, and recognizes opposition leader Juan Guaido as president. Buttigieg says he supports regime change in Venezuela, but without the use of military force. Bernie Sanders, while critical of Maduro, does not recognize Guaido as president.

**Israel & Palestine.** Buttigieg supports separate Israeli and Palestinian nations, the "two-state solution." He also supports Trump's move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, which is seen as an endorsement of Israel's claim to the divided city. Sanders, who is Jewish, has been more critical of Israel. He has criticized Israel's disproportionate use of force against Palestinians, opposed Jewish settlements in Palestinian territories (in accordance with international law), defended the civil rights of Palestinians, condemned the Israeli law that officially declared the country a Jewish state, and has indicated a willingness to withhold U.S. military aid to Israel.

**Trade agreements.** Pete Buttigieg is critical of the old North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), because it led to the loss of jobs to lower-wage Mexico. He supports Donald Trump's replacement trade deal (dubbed the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA). Bernie Sanders voted against NAFTA and also opposed Trump's USMCA, which he calls "NAFTA 2.0." Sanders has also opposed the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), as well as trade deals with China, South Korea, and Central America. His objections center around the lack of protections for workers and the failure of these agreements to address climate change.

**Authorization of military force.** Both candidates want to repeal the law passed after 9/11 that authorizes the President to use military force against terrorists. That law, intended to fight al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, has been used by presidents since 2001 to send troops to at least nine other countries, including the Philippines and the nation of Georgia. Buttigieg would change the law to require Congressional renewal every three years. Sanders, who admits being wrong to initially vote for the law, now agrees it should be repealed.

There are many similarities between the foreign policy positions of Pete Buttigieg and Bernie Sanders, and also among most of the other Democratic candidates. They generally advocate using diplomacy rather than military force, and support a more generous immigration policy and deeper cooperation with other countries.

Where the candidates differ is on the extent to which the candidates believe that U.S. foreign policy should focus on reducing income and wealth inequality and fighting climate change. In these areas, Sanders stands apart from the other candidates, including Buttigieg:

- While Buttigieg refers to the importance of advancing our “national interest,” Sanders more often refers to the need to advance the interests of “working people” and not corporations in the U.S. and globally. Mayor Pete says he wants trade policies that protect American jobs, while Sanders focuses on not only on maintaining jobs, but on increasing workers’ share of the economy here and abroad.
- On climate change, Buttigieg urges international cooperation, while Sanders also emphasizes U.S leadership and assistance in fostering climate change action.
- The candidates also differ when it comes to grassroots engagement. For example, Buttigieg proposes a new “service corps” (e.g. a Climate Corps) as a way to engage young people in national service to better the world. Sanders urges ordinary people to organize and demand change (hence his campaign slogan, “not me, us”).

The differences in foreign policy between Pete Buttigieg and Bernie Sanders in many ways mirror the differences in domestic policy. And these differences also tend to define the wings of the Democratic Party to which the candidates belong: Pete Buttigieg is part of the moderate wing; Bernie Sanders the progressive wing.

Beyond the differences in style and personality, it is this division that has come to frame the 2020 presidential primary.

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## Discussion

1. What foreign policy issues are most important to you? Why?
2. Do you think Americans care about candidates’ foreign policy positions? Should we care?
3. How should the United States and other wealthy and powerful countries use their power in the world?
4. Can the U.S. advance its own interests, as Pete Buttigieg prioritizes, and also support human rights and economic justice as Senator Sanders advocates?
5. Compare Buttigieg’s international policies to those of President Trump. How do they differ?
6. Compare Sanders’ international policies to those of President Trump. How do they differ?
7. Bernie Sanders goes much further than Pete Buttigieg in criticizing U.S. intervention in the affairs of other countries. In what circumstances should the U.S. be the “world’s policeman”?
8. Over one half of U.S. “discretionary” spending goes to the military, and the U.S. military budget is vastly larger than than of any other nation. Do we spend too much on the military? (Discretionary spending is the part of the U.S. budget that is not mandated by law. Mandatory budget items include Social Security and Medicare.)